

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Marvin Forbes, Usie Richards, Cleared By Rules Committee

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ST. CROIX -- Marvin Forbes, whose nomination was [held in committee in March](#) as senators cited his lack of experience and preparedness to serve on the Virgin Islands Port Authority's board, received a favorable vote on Thursday during a Committee on Rules and Judiciary hearing.

So too, did former Senator Usie Richards for the Casino Control Commission. Mr. Richards, who was narrowly approved, faced questions about sexual harassment levied against him by five women, which ended with a settlement paid for by the Government of the Virgin Islands.

On Mr. Forbes's nomination, Senator Jean Forde, who said he had expressed reservation regarding Mr. Forbes's previous presentation, said the case presented by Mr. Forbes's on Thursday "far exceeds" the March effort.

"I want to say that if I was to describe you, you're certainly persistent, you're certainly determined, you are interested, very community-minded, you're involved. And of course, since your last presentation for this nomination, you have presented on numerous occasions on other bills as well. Again, testament to your involvement in the community," Mr. Forde said.

But while Mr. Forbes won praise from some lawmakers, including Senator Nereida Rivera'O'Reilly, who thanked the nominee for adding substance to his presentation, Senator Janette Millin Young and Senator Justin Harrigan voted against Mr. Forbes's nomination, with Mrs. Millin Young expressing doubt that Mr. Forbes could have gained the experience that the committee agreed he lacked in March in 7 months.

"To tell you the honest truth, I still don't see how we have advanced from the last hearing to now," Mrs. Millin Young said. She said she'd gone over Mr. Forbes's testimony, which listed some of his experiences as being part of the Boy Scouts, as well as his founding status at the VI Action Group, a watchdog organization that says its goal is to ensure fair elections in the territory.

"I just don't see how a few months from the last time that prerequisite experience could have been gained and therefore I cannot give Mr. Forbes my support. But I offer him my congratulations since I already heard that he has the votes," Mrs. Millin Young concluded. Mr. Forbes was supported by Mrs. Rivera'O'Reilly, who moved the motion for his approval, which was seconded by Senator Novelle Francis, who also supported Mr. Forbes. Senators Kenneth Gittens and Mr. Forde voted in the affirmative as well. Senator Neville James was absent.

Mr. Richards faced questions relative to sexual harassment charges brought against him by several women in 2004 as a first-term senator. He went on to win four times following the allegations, but the accusations have dogged him to this day, as made clear by the questioning he faced at Thursday's hearing.

But the former senator, who said the allegations amounted to a grand conspiracy to mar his candidacy, contended that back then he was a rising star and a threat to sitting senators. And he backed up those claims by pointing out that all of the five women who accused him worked in the offices of senators who were part of the majority caucus, whose own positions were threatened by Mr. Richards's rising prominence.

Mr. Richards, who said he welcomed the opportunity to defend his reputation, said the allegations, which never went to court and was dealt with by the Senate (the courts said the Legislature has jurisdiction to handle matters concerning its members), said he was not given due process by an ethics committee created by the Senate to oversee the allegations, and that he and his lawyers were not allowed to wholly respond to the accusations. In fact, Mr. Richards said, he was not even allowed to challenge his accusers.

In the end, the former senator was charged with "unprofessional and illegal conduct," and the matter was settled, with the accusers receiving an unknown amount of monies in the settlement. The Legislature has refused to release details on the case.

Both female lawmakers, Janette Millin Young and Nereida Rivera-O'Reilly, said they had never experienced harassment or gotten any tinge of it while working with Mr. Richards. Yet, while Mrs. Rivera O'Reilly went on to approve Mr. Richards's nomination, Mrs. Millin Young voted against the nominee; part of her argument being the fact that it costed the government monies.

For Mr. Richards, the situation is complex. He said he had no mechanism through which his name could be cleared, and stressed that he was never charged with a crime.

Senator Jean Forde also echoed Mrs. Millin Young's concern, and compounded with the many calls he said he received from constituents urging him not to vote favorably for Mr. Richards, he joined Mrs. Millin Young as the two dissenters. The favorable votes of Senators Francis, Gittens and Rivera O'Reilly were enough to send Mr. Richards's nomination to the full Senate.

Feature Image: From left to right: Marvin Forbes and Usie Richards. (Credit: VI Legislature and Governor Kenneth Mapp Administration, respectively)